

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-10 SAM-01 OMB-01 EB-07 SAB-01 COME-00 /086 W

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R 130728Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3419

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 85

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1733

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,HSY, IZ

SUBJ: ESCALATION SYRIAN-IRAQI EUPHRATES WATER DISPUTE

1. SYRIA'S DECISION TO CLOSE BAGHDAD OFFICE OF SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES AND DAMASCUS OFFICE OF IRAQI AIRWAYS HAS ESCALATED WAR OF WORDS BETWEEN TWO BAATHI REGIMES TO LEVEL OF CONCRETE ACTION. THIS HAS LED BEIRUT DAILY L'ORIENT LE JOUR TO SPECULATE THAT CLOSURE OF AIRLINE OFFICES MIGHT BE PRELUDE TO RUPTURE OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. NEWSPAPER NOTED THAT IRAQ HAD ALREADY RECALLED ITS COMMERCIAL AND MILITARY ATTACHES IN DAMASCUS.

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2. DAMASCUS PRESS MAY 11 ACCUSED "RIGHTIST FASCIST REGIME

IN IRAQ" OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MURDER OF LEBANESE YOUTH, RASHID FARIS AL-MASRI, UNDER TORTURE AT "QASR AN-NIHAYA" PRISON. REPORT SAID AL-MASRI HAD BEEN LIVING IN FRANCE AND HAD ARRANGED WITH EX-IRAQI FONMIN ABD KARIM AL-SHAYKHALI TO COME TO IRAQ WHERE HE WAS ARRESTED FOR UNKNOWN REASONS.

3. OVER MAY 10-11, SEVERAL SYRIAN COLUMNISTS TOOK UP CRY AGAINST IRAQ IN FAMILIAR HYPERBOLE. ONE FORECAST THAT IRAQ ARMY WOULD SOON REMOVE ITS TRAITOROUS RULERS AND ADDED THAT ARAB PEOPLE WERE WONDERING WHETHER A NEW BAGHDAD PACT WAS BEING BORN IN WHICH SADDAM HUSSEIN WOULD ACT FOR ZIONIST AND AMERICAN IMPERIALISM IN ATTACKING REVOLUTIONARY REGIME IN SYRIA.

4. COMMENT: SYRIA'S INCREASINGLY EMOTIONAL PRE-OCCUPATION WITH IRAQ IS REACHING POINT WHERE IT MAY WELL AFFECT SYRIAN POSITIONS TOWARD BROADER QUESTIONS OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE AND SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL. SYRIAN VERBAL BROADSIDES AT IRAQ HAVE ALREADY NICKED IRAN, THROUGH CRITICISM OF IRAQ-IRAN AGREEMENT. (IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TELLS ME HE HAS SIGNED HIS UNHAPPINESS TO SARG AND BEEN ASSURED BY PRIME MINISTER PERSONALLY THAT CRITICISM OF IRAN, HOWEVER INDIRECT, WILL BE SHUT OFF.) U.S. HAS BEEN IMPLICATED IN RECENT DAYS THROUGH PRESS ACCUSATIONS THAT IRAQI LEADERS ARE AMERICAN AGENTS. IF DISPUTE CONTINUES AT ITS CURRENT LEVEL OF INTENSITY, AND IT PROBABLY WILL, SYRIA MIGHT WELL FEEL OBLIGED TO TOUGHEN ITS POSITION, AT LEAST IN PUBLIC, TOWARD ISRAEL AND PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS FLANKS FROM IRAQI CRITICISM. SUCH STATEMENTS WILL ONLY COMPLICATE EFFORTS TO REGAIN MOMENTUM OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS INsofar AS SYRIA IS CONCERNED.
MURPHY

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